

"THE STORY OF OUR LIVES FROM YEAR TO YEAR."

# All the Year Round

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## A RED SISTER.

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### CHAPTER XVIII.

LOIS, on the upper floor, tossing restlessly on her bed, felt, like Herrick, oppressed by the great and sudden stillness which had seemed to fall upon the house.

"It is the coming of the Angel of Death," she said to herself. "All creation sinks into silence before him. Perhaps even now he stands upon the doorstep." And acting as she ever did upon impulses for which she could offer no reason, she sprang from her bed, flung wide her casement, and peered into the outer darkness as if she expected her eyes there and then to be greeted by some strange and awful sight.

And Lady Joan, keeping her drear night-watch in the room below, was likewise conscious of the sudden lull which seemed to have fallen upon creation, and which seemed something other than the herald of an approaching storm. As she sat there, a mute watcher beside the dying man, with eyes fixed, strange to say, not upon his pain-stricken features, but upon a small table at the foot of the bed, the thoughts of her heart seemed in that intense stillness to speak as with living voice to her:

"Southmoor to be sold ! Only that feeble, useless life in the other room between you and wealth that would buy Southmoor thrice over ! Thirty years of bondage for nothing ! And there in that little bottle on that table is aconite enough

to end that feeble life a dozen times over."

This was about the pith of those thoughts which, with ceaseless iteration, had rung in her ears, and which now seemed to be, as it were, proclaiming themselves from a house-top.

That hard-featured Yorkshire woman with a handkerchief tied over her head, who sat like a wooden piece of furniture in a farther corner, must surely hear them, and would presently start up and put that bottle under lock and key. John, too, as he lay so white and still, possibly caught the gist of them in some troubled dream ; and that was why ever and anon his breathing grew so painful and laboured. Herrick, even, in the other room, must be conscious of what was making such a racket in her brain, and would presently rush in and call her a——ah !

Lady Joan, with a start, put her hands over her ears. Would to Heaven the storm would break, the thunder crash over the house, and put to flight this awful stillness ! It seemed to her as if all creation had suddenly ceased its own work on purpose to spy in upon her at hers.

This was a terror for which she had not bargained when she had made out her programme for the night.

She rose unsteadily to her feet. She felt she must break the spell of that terrible stillness, or else succumb to it utterly. A word with Herrick in the next room might put all her weird fancies to flight. Why was he, too, so still and silent in there ? How was it that never a sound of movement came from the other side of the door ?

As she pushed back that door her

question was answered. There sat Herrick, leaning back in his chair, locked in sleep. He looked pale and worn; his brow was knotted into a deep frown. Most mothers, looking down thus on a sleeping son, would have yearned to kiss the sad young face.

"My boy! my boy! Would to Heaven I alone could bear this sorrow!" would have been the cry of most mothers' hearts. Not so Lady Joan. Her thoughts flowed in another current. She took his measure, so to speak, and appraised him as calmly as if he were an utter stranger. How like to her own people he looked, with his handsome, clean-cut features, and dark-brown wavy hair! Why, there were at least a dozen Herricks to be found in the picture gallery at Southmoor; some in Elizabethan, some in Cavalier, and others in Jacobean dress. What in life could be more suitable than that he should marry a daughter of her house and settle down at Southmoor as a representative of the race? What in life would have been more likely to come about if he could have been earlier separated from the baleful plebeian influence of the old grandfather who, even in his dying hour, was bent on encouraging the young man's infatuated passion for a girl of no birth and breeding?

Here a sudden change of expression swept over Lady Joan's face; for the light of the one lamp which hung above Herrick's head was caught and refracted by a half-hoop of diamonds and rubies on his finger exactly similar to one she had noted upon Lois White's hand as it had rested in old Mr. Gaskell's clasp.

Her lips tightened.

What would be the end of all this, if she were to remain quiescent and inactive in this crisis of his life and her own? Now, supposing she were to go to him—not to-day nor to-morrow, but at some future time—and say: "Herrick, Southmoor is to be sold." Would he at once exclaim: "Mother, let us give up this odiously new place and detestable plebeian trade, buy the old acres, and settle down in your own county among your own people!" No, a thousand times no! Would he not be much more likely to say, as his father and grandfather had before him: "It would be Quixotic to invest money in such a non-paying concern."

Lady Joan turned sharply away. Instead, however, of going back direct to her husband's room, she went out by another

door, and along the corridor towards old Mr. Gaskell's room.

And if one passing along that corridor had chanced to meet her in her clinging grey draperies, he would not have needed to say: "Who is this approaching with weird white face and gleaming eyes?" but would rather have exclaimed: "Where is her knife hidden? Why, here is Atropos herself!"

Whether embodied or otherwise, Fate assuredly must have been abroad in the Castle that night. For there was Lois overhead flinging wide her casement and peering out into the dark, silent world for some invisible, nameless terror; there had been Herrick saying to himself over and over again: "I must keep watch to-night not over two, but over three;" and yet Lady Joan, with steady, silent footsteps, went her way without let or hindrance to old Mr. Gaskell's room.

Parsons lifted her head as Lady Joan entered, and rubbed her eyes, for the old body had been indulging in a quiet nap in her easy-chair between the intervals of her attendance upon her patient.

She made a little stumble and a rush towards a table on which stood cups and glasses containing beef-tea, egg and milk, or other nutritive food.

Lady Joan laid her hand upon her arm.

"Wait a moment, don't disturb him. I want you to go downstairs for me—give him that when you come back. What is it?"

"Beef-tea, my lady! Downstairs, my lady! It won't keep me away from the sick-room long, will it, my lady? For Dr. Scott he did say to me the last thing, my lady, 'Parsons,' he said, 'everything depends on you to-night—give the food and medicine regularly, and—'"

"It won't keep you five minutes out of the sick-room; and I will stay here till you return. There is a storm coming, as perhaps you know."

"Yes, my lady."

"Very well. Mr. Herrick's dog, Argus, has no doubt as usual been left by him in the outer hall; the dog has a terror of thunderstorms, and with the first peal will begin to howl so terribly we shall hear him here. I want you to take him down to the servants' hall at the other side of the house, and shut him in for the remainder of the night. Stay a moment! Jervis can go with you if you are afraid to go about the house alone in the middle of the night. I would ask Mr. Herrick to do this, but he

has fallen asleep in the other room, and I do not like to disturb him."

As Parsons and the other nurse departed in company, Lady Joan, softly looking in upon Herrick, saw that he still soundly slept.

After this her movements became hurried and nervous; one look she gave to her still unconscious husband. Was it her fancy, or was his breathing growing fainter and less regular than it had been before? She took possession of the small phial of aconite which stood on the bedside table, and made her way once more to old Mr. Gaskell's room; this time passing, not by way of the corridor, but through the intermediate room. Time was precious; three minutes it would take those two women to reach the outer hall, ten minutes must be allowed to their slow middle-aged movements for reaching the servants' hall on the other side of the house, fastening in the dog, and returning to their post. But no more; it would be rash to allow even a half-minute more than this.

She approached the bedside of the old man slowly, stealthily. Mute, motionless, helpless he lay; his faint, hurried breathing much the same as that of a tired child sinking to sleep after a day of play which has over-taxed his strength. His head and shoulders were propped high on his pillows, his face showed grey and sunken against the white linen; his silvery hair, pushed back from his brow, left every wrinkle bare to view. The contour of his head was noble and impressive, and was thrown into bold relief by the purple satin curtains which canopied the bed, and the purple satin quilt which covered it. Lady Joan could easily have persuaded herself that she was looking down on some dead king lying in state; so regal and motionless the old man looked amid his costly surroundings.

She took possession of the cup of beef-tea which Parsons had placed ready for her patient, and, with the phial of aconite in her other hand, went into the room which intervened between the rooms of the two invalids.

This intermediate room was lighted only by a single lamp, turned low. Lady Joan, with her cup and phial, stood beneath it. Her hand was perfectly steady now; every nerve in it seemed made of steel.

Yet that terrible stillness around, here, there, everywhere! Not so much as a ticking clock within, nor "lisp of leaves" without to drown the clamour of her own

thoughts, which once more seemed to cry aloud to her.

"Now or never, Joan," those thoughts seemed to say now. "Wait till the morning, and your chance is gone! Strike for your freedom, Joan; shake off your manacles! Why should you serve thirty years in bondage for nothing?"

One, two, three drops of the poison fell into the cup.

Hush! What was that? For a moment her hand paused, and her heart seemed to stand still. She looked hastily round. Ah! it was only the big yellow rose in a jar on a side-table falling to pieces. But her nerves had been shaken; her hand trembled; and now the poison drops fell uncounted into the cup.

Hush! Another sound. The door opening, was it? Once more Lady Joan looked round with terror in her eyes. Assuredly the door of the room—the door that opened into the corridor—had been softly opened, and softly, hurriedly closed again.

She set down her phial and cup, and went out hastily into the corridor. It could not be the nurses returned already, she thought, as she strained her eyes right and left along the long, dark passage. In view of possible emergency, this passage had been left dimly lighted at one end, the end at which she stood. Amid the deepening shadows at the farther end she thought she saw a fluttering white skirt disappearing round the bend of the staircase.

Lady Joan's thoughts flew to Lucy Harwood and her somnambulistic tendencies. No doubt to-night, as on the previous night, the girl had come down the staircase and gone along the corridor, feeling her way, and looking for the person or thing whereon her mind was set. Most likely the touch on the cold door-handle had thrilled and awakened her, and she had hastily fled, fearing to encounter Lady Joan's anger.

"She must be taken in hand to-morrow," said Lady Joan, setting her lips tightly together. "In the dim light, and in her half-sleeping state, she can have seen nothing definite."

Moments were getting precious now. Lady Joan swiftly and softly went back to her phial and cup of beef-tea; the one she replaced on the bedside table, the other she carried straight to old Mr. Gaskell's room. She paused for an instant in the doorway to ascertain if his slumber were

still unbroken. Then, swiftly and softly still, she approached his bedside. With one hand she covered her eyes, with the other she set down the cup of beef-tea on the small table.

One wistful, pathetic look from those blue eyes, which recalled at times so vividly the look in another pair of dying eyes, and she felt that her dread purpose might remain unfulfilled.

#### CHAPTER XIX.

Two o'clock struck in succession softly and sonorously, or briskly and blithely, from a variety of clocks in different parts of the Castle.

Herrick, with a start, awoke and jumped from his chair. All his fears, anxieties, and forebodings came back upon him in a rush. He had been sleeping for an hour! What might not have happened in that hour! He went at once and hastily into the adjoining room.

The nurse came forward to meet him.

"I was about to call you, sir," she said. "I fear Lady Joan's strength is giving way; and I fear, too, a change has taken place in your father."

"Go, call Dr. Scott immediately," was Herrick's reply; and then he went to his father's side and took his hand in his.

Yes; the pulse beat more feebly now; a slight change, a more rigid look, had come into the grey, drawn face. His breath, however, was as before—hard and laboured.

Lady Joan, at the foot of the bed, seemed clinging, as if for support, to the brass rail.

Herrick poured out a glass of wine and took it to her.

"Drink this, mother, or your strength will altogether give way," he said.

Her face appeared to him strangely flushed; her eyes shone with an unnatural light. She drank the wine—eagerly, it seemed to him—and as she gave him back the glass he could see that she was trembling from head to foot, and that the support of the foot-rail of the bed was a necessity to her.

At that moment his attention was diverted from Lady Joan by a sudden, uneasy movement of his father's arm which lay upon the coverlet. His hard, laboured breathing, also, suddenly ceased; his eyes opened wide, and fixed, with an odd, startled look in them, on the door which led through the ante-room to old

Mr. Gaskell's room. Slowly, slowly, his eyes, still with the odd, startled look in them, moved, as if following the motion of some one walking from that door towards the other end of the room.

Lady Joan, standing still at the foot of the bed, seized Herrick's hands in a state of nervous terror.

Clear, slow, and stern, at that moment came John Gaskell's voice from the bed.

"Stand back, Joan," he said, "and let my father pass."

At the same instant the door of old Mr. Gaskell's room opened, and Parsons, looking white and flurried, came in.

"Oh, my lady," she whispered, in a quaking voice, "Mr. Gaskell has just breathed his last. I went to his side a moment ago, and saw that he was sinking rapidly. I had not time to call you or Mr. Herrick before he was gone."

Lady Joan made a strange acknowledgement of the sad tidings. She still trembled from head to foot; her hands, clay-cold, still clutched at Herrick's arm; but she contrived to control her voice sufficiently to say:

"Let there be no mistake, Parsons. At once write down the exact hour and minute at which Mr. Gaskell died."

#### THE GAY SCIENCE.

THE Gay Science, as poetry was brightly designated by the troubadours, ought surely to promote, not only the gaiety of nations, as it unquestionably does, but the gaiety of its professors, which, according to a certain class of sentimentalists, it does not. A great poet has, indeed, acknowledged that he found his art its own "exceeding great reward"; but the writers to whom I refer persist in ringing the changes upon Shelley's complaint that "Poets learn in suffering what they teach in song," and upon Wordsworth's, that "They begin in gladness," but thereof "comes in the end despondency and madness." They love to connect the Gay Science—an unnatural union—with sorrow and misadventure; to represent the singer as the innocent victim of some mysterious but inevitable Doom—always with a big D. Now, no one can deny that poets have lived unhappy lives; but so have their critics, and many others, and my contention is that their unhappiness has usually arisen in their defects of temper and character, or in the pressure of

external circumstances. I do not believe that genius carries with it a heritage of woe. The poet who, like Wordsworth, or Tennyson, or Browning, dedicates himself to the service of the altar, may count, as it seems to me, upon a reasonable felicity of life. His course will probably be as smooth as—or even smoother than—that of men generally. But it is not less certain that in proportion to his experience of the "Sturm und Drang" of the passions, and his intercourse with humanity under varying aspects and conditions, will be the force, truth, depth, and vitality of his song. The poet, of all men, as Julius Hare remarks, has the liveliest sympathy with the world around him, which to his eyes "looks with such a look," and to his ears "speaks with such a tone," that he almost receives its heart into his own. Without his vast knowledge of men and manners, and of the darker sides of life, Dante could never have written his "Divina Commedia," nor would Milton, without his share in the sharp contentions of his time, have composed his "Samson Agonistes."

There can be no reason why the poet should be exempt from those vicissitudes which afflict his fellow-men. And there can be no reason, on the other hand, why the cultivation of the Gay Science should bring with it any special penalties. I think that a cursory review of the biography of European poets—I exclude the poets of the United Kingdom on the obvious ground of familiarity—will establish both these conclusions.

Let us begin with Francisco Manoel, a Portuguese bard, who experienced the rude usage of fortune. He incurred the anger of the Inquisition, and one of its agents was sent to arrest him. Suspecting the man's errand, the poet seized a dagger, and threatened to stab him if he spoke. Snatching off his cloak, he wrapped himself in it, turned the key on the emissary, and fled for shelter to the house of a French merchant, until he was able to escape on board a French vessel bound for Havre de Grace.

Benedetto Vardio, the Italian poet, was exposed to no less a danger—not through his genius as a poet, it is true, but through his meddling in politics. Cosmo the First, of Florence, engaged him to write a history of the civil war, in which the Medici had triumphed; and certain persons, who had reason to fear that he would depict them in no favourable colours, attacked him by night, and attempted to

assassinate him. Succour came before they had finished their deadly work; and, though his wounds were serious, he eventually recovered.

Guarini, the celebrated author of "Il Pastor Fido"—so admirably translated, with nervous seventeenth-century English, by Sir Richard Fanshawe—tasted the bitters of banishment. Such was also the ill-fortune of Angelo di Costanzo. Strange was the fate of Alessandro Guidi. His translation of the "Homilies of Pope Clement the Eleventh" having passed through the press, he set out to present a copy to the Pope; but on the journey discovered so many misprints in its pages, that his vexation threw him into a fever; and the fever brought on an attack of apoplexy, of which he died. To this melancholy list of unfortunate Italian poets, I may add Silvio Pellico, whose liberal politics gave offence to the Austrian Government of Milan. He was arrested, tried, and sentenced to death; but the sentence was commuted to imprisonment in the Spielberg, where he languished for ten weary years. The beautiful narrative of his sufferings, entitled "Le Mie Prigioni," is well known in England. The captivity of Tasso, the author of "La Gerusalemme Liberata," who for upwards of seven years was shut up in the Hospital of Santa Anna as a madman, has moved the pity of many a sympathetic heart, but is still involved in mystery.

Banished from his beloved Florence, Dante, the immortal seer and poet of the "Divina Commedia," wandered from town to town, homeless, dependent, and blown hither and thither "by the sharp wind that springs from wretched poverty." One day he arrived at the convent of the Corvo alle Fori della Marca, where he was received by the monk, Frate Ilario. "And seeing him there," writes the monk, "as yet unknown to me and my brethren, I questioned him as to what he wished and wanted. He made no answer, but stood and silently contemplated the columns and arches of the cloister. Again I asked him what he wished, and whom he sought. Then, slowly turning his head, and looking at the friars, and at me, he answered, 'Pacé!' Thereupon, my desire to know him, and whom he might be, increasing, I drew him aside, when, after speaking a few words with him, I recognised him at once; for though I had never seen him before, his renown had long since reached my ears. When he saw how I fixed my

gaze upon his countenance, and with what strange affection I listened to him, he drew from his bosom a book, and opening it gently, offered it to me, saying: 'Sir Friar, here is a portion of my poem, which, perchance, thou hast not seen. This I leave with thee as a token. Forget me not!'

Some time afterwards, the great poet, wrapped in the cowl and mantle of a Franciscan friar, and in the majesty of his austere but mighty genius, lay down to die in the palace of Ravenna. By his bedside lovingly watched Guido da Polenta, his friend and protector—the unhappy father of that Francesca da Rimini, whose sad unrestrained passion forms so touching an episode in Dante's poem. It was the day of the Holy Cross; and we may not unreasonably conjecture that some solemn laud or chant fell on the ears of the dying man, as, hovering on the brink of the grave, "he beheld eyes of light, wandering like stars." After he had expired, the cowl and mantle were removed; he was clothed in the poet's singing-robcs, while his friend pronounced a eulogy on his character and genius.

But now let us turn for a moment to the other side of the shield, and we shall see that even Italy counts among its poets many a prosperous name. Petrarcha, in the Capitol of Rome, received the laurel crown amidst the applause of the Roman nobles and citizens. Employed on many important public embassies, he gained the respect and gratitude of his fellow-countrymen; and was followed to his honoured grave by the Prince of Padua, the ecclesiastical dignitaries, and the students of the University. Boiardo, the author of the "Orlando Innamorato," discharged several diplomatic missions, and was made governor of Reggio. Bembo lived a life of singular serenity and prosperity; and Ariosto, to whom we owe the fine extravagance of the "Orlando Furioso," made enough money by his writings to build himself a house at Ferrara. Chiabura enjoyed a life of lettered ease, marrying at fifty, and dying full of years and honour at eighty-five. Marini found a patron in Marie de Medicis. Redi was principal physician to Duke Cosmo the Third. And Vincenzo Monti, the greatest of Italy's later poets, after receiving various dignities at the liberal hands of Napoleon, was finally allowed a sufficient income by the city of Milan.

If we look at the German poets, we find that Fortune distributed among them her smiles and frowns with edifying impartiality. The even tenor of such lives as those of Hagedorn and Gellert leaves little to be desired. There was scarcely a cloud on the life-horizon of Klopstock, the poet of "The Messiah," once very popular in England. He died in his eightieth year. Lessing, famous as a poet—did he not write "Nathan the Wise"?—but more famous as a critic—passed his tranquil days in the enjoyment of lettered ease. As much may be said of Wieland, the author of "Oberon" and translator of Shakespeare, of Pfleffel, of Claudius, of Herder, who was made President of the High Consistory at Weimar, and ennobled; of Stolberg, Voss, Tiege, Schiller, Matthisson, Werner, Rückert, Uhland, Freiligrath, and the greatest of all, Goethe. The last-named, in truth, may be said to have lived among the immortals—in the serenest of atmospheres—high above the din and darkness of this lower world.

But how painful a contrast is the case of Heine, whose life, like that of Pope, may be said to have been "one long disease"! Disease of the soul and of the body—the former torn with impatient ideas, with doubts, and restless aspirations, and vague longings; the latter afflicted with an agonising spinal malady. Lying on his sick-bed—his "mattress-grave," as he called it—which for nearly eight years he never quitted, he described to his friend Meissner "the long tortures of his sleepless nights," and confessed that the weak thoughts of suicide sometimes rose upon his brain, growing longer and more intense, until he found strength to repel them in the recollection of his beloved wife, and of many a work which he might yet live to complete. Terrible was it to hear him exclaim with fearful earnestness and in a suppressed voice—"Think on Günther, Burger, Kleist, Hölderlin, Grabbe, and the wretched Lenau! Some curse weighs heavily on the poets of Germany!" But in most instances, let me add, the curse was self-imposed. Grabbe broke down his health by habits of debauchery: the gifts received from Heaven he degraded to the meanest uses, and died at the early age of thirty-five—as much a suicide as if he had cut his throat or blown out his brains. More honourable is the record of Von Kleist. Having drawn his sword in the Prussian service, he was mortally wounded

at the battle of Kunersdorff, and died a few days afterwards. The glorious death of the patriot, which Southey likens to Elijah's chariot of fire, crowned the brief life of the poet Körner at the early age of twenty-two. He fell on the field of battle, near Rosenberg, in August, 1813, fighting against the hosts of Napoleon, having completed, only an hour before, his famous lyric, "The Song of the Sword," and read it to his comrades. Very different was the fate of Kotzebue. He fell by an assassin's hand, having incurred the hatred of Young Germany by his Russian sympathies and reactionary political creed. But he was no true student at any time of the Gay Science.

The last years of Burger—with whom Sir Walter Scott first made the English public familiar—were, I admit, most pitifully and meanly wretched; but the wretchedness was of his own making. With his first wife he had lived unhappily; and on her death he married her sister, for whom he had long cherished a violent passion. In less than a year she died. Four years afterwards the infatuated man took to himself a third wife—a young Swabian girl, who had made hot love to him in a poem. Flattered by the homage, he conceived the idea of an earthly paradise to be realised by the union of poet and poetess, but soon discovered that he had made a grievous mistake. In two years' time he divorced the poetess, and, a couple of years later, died in extreme poverty. But neither his poverty nor his domestic infelicity could be laid to the blame of Apollo. On the contrary, we may agree, I think, that the poet has always this signal advantage over those of his fellow-men, who, like him, may be afflicted by want, by physical disease, or by domestic treason. He can always escape from the presence of his trouble into a world of his own—a world created by his own genius; an enchanted island, like Ariel's, in "The Tempest"; a fairy-land as bright as that of Oberon and Titania—whereas, other men, who have no such resource, are tied to the stake by enduring bonds, and must bear as best they can the fierce heat of the flames that surround them.

If we direct our attention to the history of French poetry, we shall find that it does but confirm and strengthen the conclusions at which we have already arrived, namely, that the poet is governed

by the same laws as other men; and that the success or failure of his life depends upon the use he makes of it. When Villon lives like a rogue and a rake, like a rogue and a rake he must pay the miserable penalty. Ronsard was the friend and companion of kings; and, if he had not wallowed in the mire of sensuality, might have gone down to his grave full of years and honours. No black mourning-borders surround the lives of Dorat, Belleau, and Desportes. Their careers were prosperous, and their deaths lamented. As for Jean Bertaut, his bark was borne on fortune's fullest tide; one's mouth waters as one reads of the good things that fell to his lot. Head Almoner to the Queen, Councillor to the Parliament of Grenoble, Abbé of Aunay, Bishop of Siez—was ever professor of the Gay Science more happily distinguished? Corneille had his detractors (of course, for was he not a genius?); but, on the whole, his life-course was enviably smooth, and when he died, at the age of seventy-eight, I do not think he had much to complain of. Molière, no doubt, had his "peck of troubles." His wife was not all a wife should be, and he suffered from pulmonary consumption; but he had a compensation denied to most jilted husbands in the applause which his genius extorted from the crowded theatre. La Fontaine's eighty-three years touched him gently. He was never without friends, and the careless geniality and easy simplicity which procured him the sobriquet of "*le Bon Homme*"—a jolly good fellow, as we may paraphrase it—prevented him from smarting under those pin-pricks of everyday life which sensitive natures feel so keenly.

A fair share of fame and fortune fell to the satirist Boileau—more than, as a satirist, he deserved. He had a little trouble with his critics; but then he was a critic himself, as well as a poet, and well knew how to hold his own. The Abbé Cotin attacked him in a satire which had the disadvantage of being dull, and Boileau extinguished him by the brightness of his raillery, so that he had no reason to regret the combat into which he had been provoked. Then what shall we say of Racine? He was pensioned, appointed Royal historiographer, and seated among the Forty Immortals. And if, in his declining years, he fell into disgrace, it was because he forsook his métier of poet, and turned politician.

Voltaire, somewhat idly, has been described as "a strange compound of virtues and vices, folly and wisdom, the little and the great," which will account for the mingled yarn which was woven into the web of his life. But, on the whole, he basked in the sunshine. "The farther he advanced in his career," says Barante, "the more he saw himself encompassed with fame and homage. Soon even sovereigns became his friends, and almost his flatterers;" and when, at the age of eighty-four, he paid his last visit to Paris, his welcome was one which a king might have envied. "The Forty" gave him an enthusiastic reception, and placed his bust by the side of that of Corneille; the actors waited upon him in a body; his tragedy of "Irene" was played in the presence of the Royal Family; at the sixth representation, he was presented with a laurel-wreath as he entered the theatre, and, at the close of the performance, his bust was crowned, while an excited audience roared applause. After this, there was nothing more for the old man to do but to go home and die.

Millevoye died young, but his life had been spent in the tranquil pursuit of letters. The old age of Béranger was cheered by the love and admiration of his countrymen; he had drunk, however, of the bitter cup of adversity, having been imprisoned, for the free tone of his lyrics, by the Bourbon Government in 1828. Such vicissitudes as Lamartine experienced were due to his political activity; but it was his fame as a poet which placed him temporarily at the head of the French Republic, when it rose on the wreck of Louis Philippe's throne. Of André Chénier, Sainte-Beuve says with justice that he was one of the great masters of French poetry during the eighteenth century, and the greatest French classic in verse since Boileau and Racine. There is a richness of imagery, a glow, a fulness in Chénier's poems which one too seldom discovers in the masters of French song. I admit that his life did not flow evenly. At first, he missed his vocation, and suffered accordingly; afterwards, ill-health crippled him; and, lastly, the fever of the French Revolution got into his blood, and he put aside the cultivation of his art that he might share in the strife and tumult of the time. By his bold and unsparing denunciation of the excesses of the Terrorists, he incurred the hatred of Robespierre, was thrown into prison, and sent to the guillotine—meeting

his fate with the calm composure of a hero.

Few poets have basked in such a sunshine of popularity as Lope de Vega, the great Spanish dramatist. He never made his appearance in public without receiving such marks of respect as are generally reserved for Royal personages. And just as we are nowadays accustomed to attach the names of eminent statesmen or soldiers to bags, collars, and wines, or of favourite actresses to bonnets and mantles, so did the Spaniards adopt that of their favourite poet as a *cachet* or "brand," indicative of superior excellence. Thus, a brilliant diamond was called a Lope diamond; a fine day, a Lope day; a beautiful woman, a Lope woman. In this connection I may repeat a curious anecdote. The honours paid to Lope in life were continued to him in death, and his obsequies were attended by the principal grandes and nobles of Spain, the stately procession passing through streets, whose balconies and windows were graced with thousands of spectators. A woman in the crowd was heard to exclaim: "This is a Lope funeral!" Little knowing that it was, in truth, the funeral of the great poet himself.

Considerable latitude is allowed to a biographer when he sings the praises of his hero; but it may be thought that Montalvon, the biographer of Lope, exceeds all reasonable limits when he speaks of him as "the portent of the world, the glory of the land, the light of his country, the oracle of language, the centre of fame, the object of envy, the darling of fortune, the phoenix of ages, the prince of poetry, the Orpheus of science, the Apollo of the Muses, the Horace of satiric poets, the Virgil of epic poets, the Homer of heroic poets, the Pindar of lyric poets, the Sophocles of tragedy, and the Terence of comedy; single among the excellent, excellent among the great, great in every way and in every manner!" Much of this is unmeaning, and more is inapplicable; and the whole shows an absence of critical discretion which necessarily weakens the validity of the panegyric.

Calderon, a much finer genius—the author of "Il Magico Prodigioso," which may be called the Spanish "Faust"—was singularly fortunate in attaining and retaining both the patronage of the Court and the favour of the common people. When one reads over the list of preferences of which he was the happy recipient, one at first supposes that one is counting

up the good luck of some adroit courtier; and one's surprise is overwhelming at the discovery that all this prosperity actually fell to the lot of a poet! However, as a set-off against this spoiled child of fortune, we may quote the case of Francisco de Quevedo, the author of the celebrated "Suenos," or "Visions," who was twice imprisoned, and, on the second occasion, treated with such brutality, that his health broke down, and he did not long survive his release. But I do not connect his misfortunes with his cultivation of the Gay Science. His offence seems to have been the praiseworthy frankness with which he attacked the vices of his time; though, in his own opinion, he was not so outspoken as duty demanded and the state of things justified. "I showed Truth in her smock," he said, "and not quite naked"—"Verdadeo diré un camisa, Poco menos que dromedas." But as a prophet is not honoured in his own country, so a censor is never popular in his own time.

It is with some hesitation that I connect the name of Miguel Cervantes with the Gay Science. At least in England he is unknown as a poet and dramatist: his fame rests on his "Don Quixote"; and could hardly rest on a more solid and enduring basis. The principal events of his stormy career have admirably been summed up by Viardot, who adds, however, in the true sentimental vein, that he was one of the unfortunate guild who pay by a lifetime of suffering for the tardy reward of posthumous glory. This is altogether beside the mark. Cervantes owed his lifetime of suffering to his adventurous disposition; his glory to his genius. To connect the suffering and the glory is not fair or justifiable.

Born of a poor but honourable family; liberally educated, but at an early age thrown into servitude by domestic misfortunes; page, valet-de-chambre, soldier; deprived of his left hand by an arquebus shot at Lepanto; taken prisoner by a Barbary corsair; for five years tortured in the slave-dépôts of Algiers; ransomed by public charity when his courageous attempts at escape had failed; again a soldier, both in Portugal and the Azores; recalled to the pursuit of literature by love, but soon driven from it again by distress; recompensed for his service and his genius by a Government clerkship; wrongfully accused of embezzling public money, and thereafter thrown into prison; released after he had proved his innocence;

a poet by profession, and a general agent; when upwards of fifty discovering the true bent of his genius; pursued by privation and poverty even to his old age, and dying at last in obscurity—such is the life-story of Miguel de Cervantes.

We shall find a mournful pendant to this sad narrative in the life of the great poet of Portugal, Luis de Camoens, the author of the singularly beautiful epic—worthy of being much better known—"The Lusiados."

Like Cervantes, he came of a noble family. He studied at the University of Coimbra; afterwards made a gallant figure at Court; but falling in love with a lady of the palace, was banished to Santarem, where he formed the design, it is supposed, of his immortal poem. Taking up arms, he served in Africa and India, and afterwards joined an expedition against the Moorish pirates. Returning to Goa, he exposed, in a bitter satire, the infamies of the Portuguese-Indian Administration, and was punished, like Quevedo, for his inconvenient candour by being sent to Macao. There, in a cave or grotto, which overlooked the broad Indian Ocean, he composed the greater part of the "Lusiados." Being invited to return to Goa, on the voyage he was shipwrecked, but escaped with his life and his manuscript by swimming ashore, like Caesar with his "Commentaries." At Goa he was arrested and imprisoned, like Cervantes, on a false charge of peculation; but released, like him, without a blot on his escutcheon. He served in various expeditions by sea and land; underwent much humiliation from pecuniary straits; made his way back to Portugal, where the Court ignored his services, and the people read his poem, and the man of genius grew poorer every day.

The hardships he had undergone, and the effects of a tropical climate on a not very robust constitution, compelled him to lay aside his pen; and he sank into such poverty that he depended for his daily subsistence on the loyalty of his Javanese servant, who begged by night for the bread on which his master subsisted by day. At last, having lost all power of exertion, he was removed to a hospital, where he died, at the age of fifty-five, in such absolute need that he was indebted to charity for a shroud.

"How miserable a thing it is," writes the friar who ministered to the dying poet, "to see so famous a genius so ill-rewarded!"

I saw him die, in a hospital at Lisbon, without possessing a rag to cover his dead body—a warning for those who weary themselves by studying day and night without profit, like the spider who spins his web to catch flies."

But the good friar's simile seems anything but pertinent. The spider catches the prize he aims at. Camoens was less fortunate.

To complete the survey I have undertaken, I must glance at the chronicles of the Gay Science in Scandinavia. The brightest name in Danish literature is, I think, that of Oehlenschläger, whose career by no means points the moral our sentimental critics are so anxious to enforce. On the contrary, it flowed with an even current, and there was no "despondency and madness" at its end! In his youth he wrote plays, and took part in private theatricals; as he grew older, he gave up the theatricals, and went a-soldiering; travelled in Germany, and made the acquaintance of Wieland and Goethe; visited Paris, where he was introduced to Madame de Staél and Benjamin Constant; married; was appointed to a professorship in the Copenhagen University; spent his winters in lecturing, and his summer leisure in composition; lived in honour, and died in peace. Nor did the poet Ingemann turn over less prosperous leaves in the "Book of Fate." None were blank; and but few were wet with tears. Then as to Bishop Tegnér, the sweet singer of Sweden, his life was really an idyll—a pastoral romance. On the other hand, the dark side of human affairs turns up in the pathetic story of Eric Sjögren. "While yet in his cradle," says his biographer, "he was exposed to the frowns of fortune. Poverty attended the steps of the boy, checked the free and soaring genius of the youth, and stood beside the bedside of the man." He taught himself to write by cutting letters—like Orlando—in the bark of trees. With fifty shillings in his pocket he made his way to the University of Upsal, where he gained a livelihood by instructing those of his fellow-students who were younger and richer than himself. But the hard buffets dealt to him by an unsympathising fate could not repress his noble aspirations. His poetic genius flowered and ripened, and he would have struggled into the sunshine of success had not his health given way. He was only in his thirty-second year when he died.

This last melancholy example may seem to lend some colour to the fallacy against which I am protesting—the infelicity of poets by reason of their being poets—but, after all, Sjögren's misfortunes were of an exceptional character. The most prosaic of men have met with quite as harsh treatment. And in Sjögren's case we may believe or hope that they were greatly lightened by the consolation he derived from his insight into the truth and beauty of Nature. As John Sterling says: "Poetry is in itself strength and joy, whether it be crowned by all mankind, or left alone in its own magic hermitage."

### MALINE'S CONFESSION.

A STORY IN FOUR CHAPTERS.

#### CHAPTER III.

WHAT MALINE TOLD HER FATHER.

THE day on which Wilfred Power left the Grange was a very gloomy one, and both Mr. Caringham and Maline were low-spirited and depressed. Maline plied her father with questions as to the cause of Wilfred's going; but he did not tell her, and put her off with general reasons which only had the result of making her still more thoughtful and uneasy than she had been even on the previous evening.

She had asked Mr. Caringham plainly whether the cause had anything to do with the lost money, having her own reasons for the question; but he had replied by another question, asking in his turn how that could possibly be the case.

She felt certain that that was the reason, however; and wondered whether Wilfred had admitted that he had taken it; but she had not put this question to her father.

The next day was as gloomy as its predecessor; but, until dinner was over, she said nothing on the subject that was uppermost in both their thoughts.

Then like a true woman, she opened her battery suddenly.

The two were in the library, where, as it was chilly, a little fire had been lighted; and Maline carried a footstool to her father's feet and sat down, resting her head on his knee, and began.

"Daddy," she said, caressingly, "did Mr. Power go because that horrid money was lost?"

Mr. Caringham started at the direct question.

"I told you before, Mal"—he only used this abbreviation of her name in moments of deeper feeling than usual—"that such a thing was impossible."

"No, dad; all you did was to ask me whether I didn't think such a thing was impossible. I have been thinking; and it seems to me most probable. Did he, daddy? Do tell me!"

"He did not say precisely why he was going away, Mal."

"Didn't he say anything more definite than that?"

"What he did say was not definite. I'm not at all sure that I understood him, either"—adding under his breath, not for his daughter's ear, "and I'm sure I hope I didn't understand him." But she was quick, and caught the words.

"Why do you wish you didn't understand, dad? Was it something very bad?"

"He did not wish me to say why he left," answered Mr. Caringham; "so you mustn't question me, Mal."

"Then it must have been something very bad?" she said, not noticing his last words.

"What was it, daddy? Do tell me, I'm so miserable."

He stroked her head thoughtfully before he answered.

"It would only make you more miserable, my darling," he answered; and spoke with a deep sigh.

The girl altered her weapon.

"I know it had to do with that money, papa;" she spoke so earnestly and seriously that Mr. Caringham was off his guard directly.

"How can you know that, Maline?"

"Did he tell you who took the money, papa?"

"I would rather not talk about it, Mal," said Mr. Caringham.

"Well, perhaps I won't bother you after to-night any more about it," answered the girl, looking up and smiling sweetly; "but you must let me have my own way to-night. Do you know why?"

"No, my child."

"Because—because," and she paused a long time; and then kissed her father's hand, and laid her soft cheek upon it as she said, "I am going to tell you something that nobody knows, dad, nobody in all the world; and perhaps nobody ever will know, but you and me; and it will be our secret, won't it, daddy darling, our very own?"

"Yes, Mal, if you wish it. I think you can trust your old father."

The girl got up and sat on her father's knee, put her arms round him and kissed him fondly; but did not speak.

"You are crying, Mal," he said, very gently; "and your tears hurt me."

The girl hid her face on his shoulder, and whispered:

"I love him, daddy, with all my heart; and now I've lost him for ever. I drove him away; and oh, dad, my heart is broken."

The old man felt the tears coming into his own eyes, and could not speak; all he could do was to press her hand and gently pat the head that lay on his shoulder.

His grief was that he could give her no hope.

Presently she grew a little calmer, and said:

"You'll tell me now, daddy, won't you, why he left?"

"Yes, darling, it was about the money."

"Did he tell you who had taken it, dad?"

"No, Mal; but he hinted it."

"He didn't tell you out plainly." She was very anxious to have this quite clearly told to her.

"No, Mal, he hinted; and only vaguely hinted, little one."

"Shall I tell you out plainly who took it? I know."

"No, Mal, no; no, don't tell me. Besides, you can't know." And he grew suddenly afraid that the girl was going to put in plain words—what as yet was only suspicion, and then ask for Wilfred to be brought back.

"But I want to tell you."

"No, child, no. I don't want to hear."

"But those who are innocent may suffer. Listen, daddy, and don't be too angry. Let me whisper it. I took the money, darling; and I'm so wretched."

"You took it!" cried Mr. Caringham, starting so violently in his surprise that he almost sent her off his knee.

"Yes, dad, I wanted some money to—to pay some old bills with, and I didn't like to ask you."

"But, my child, Maline—" he began; but she would not let him finish, stopping his mouth with kisses.

"Don't scold me to-night, dad, dearest; I can't bear it. I've been so miserable. I won't do it again—I won't, really. And to-morrow I'll come to you and be scolded ever so much; because you mustn't for-

give me without scolding me, and you mustn't scold me without forgiving me. And—and you'll send for Wilfred to come back, won't you?" she asked, in very low tones.

"This is a very serious thing, Maline," said Mr. Caringham, "and I—"

But she would not let him continue, throwing her arms round him and kissing him, and actually smiling, until the good man could hardly look grave.

"No; but, Maline, tell me, where is the money?"

"The money," she said, biting her lips—"the money; oh, I paid it away, dear, for the bills, you know."

"But the French notes, child—you couldn't pay those away."

"No, dad, I couldn't pay those away; they—they must be upstairs. Don't question me any more to-night, dad, please. And don't look so serious."

"But it's such an extraordinary thing for you to have done, my child. If you had come to me—"

"Don't be angry to-night, dad," pleaded the girl.

"I'm not angry, Maline; but I'm afraid I am terribly grieved."

Then she put her arms about him and caressed him fondly, trying to comfort him with many winning, affectionate ways.

"I'll tell you all about it some day, daddy darling, and then you'll see I'm not so much to blame as you think."

"Well, my child, I'll wait for that day. Try and let it be soon."

"And Wilfred will come back, won't he, daddy?"

"Yes, child, certainly. I shall send for him to-morrow."

"Then I'm so glad I told you." And she kissed him again, and smiled, and then slipped off his lap and went out of the room, leaving the old man completely puzzled what to make of her words, in view of what Wilfred had said to him before.

#### CHAPTER IV. THE TRUTH.

WILFRED POWER was greatly surprised to receive a short note from Mr. Caringham, asking him to return at once. But he did so. Mr. Caringham explained the matter to him literally, interpreting Maline's action as a freak, and asking Wilfred not to go away, at any rate, for a time.

Maline's reception of him was curious,

and there was something in the girl's manner he could not understand. If he had not seen the proofs of her act, and known of her confession, he would have thought that she seemed rather inclined to take credit to herself for what she had done, and to receive him as if he were really a returned prodigal. She was so very gentle and tender that he was puzzled.

Matters were not, therefore, quite on the same footing as they had been, though no one made any reference to the lost money.

On the second morning after Wilfred's return, Maline was alone in her room, when one of the old servants, who had been her nurse, came to her.

"If you please, miss, is this yours?" asked the woman, holding out a small blue paper to her.

"What is it, nurse?"

"I don't know, miss, quite."

"Where did you find this?" asked the girl, quickly, colouring with excitement as she examined it.

It was a French one hundred franc bank-note.

"The laundrymaid, Susan, gave it me, miss, and told me she had found it among the clothes—she thought among yours," she said.

"Tell her to come up to me at once," said Maline.

When the girl came, Maline questioned her closely, and discovered that she had really found the note, wrapped up in one of Maline's handkerchiefs, and placed in the pocket of a dress belonging to one of the maids, who had been only a short time at the Grange, and was under notice to leave.

The maid was sent for.

"Where did you get this, Rachel?" asked Maline, facing the girl, and eying her keenly.

The girl, taken quite by surprise, at first hesitated and coloured, and then denied all knowledge of it. Then Maline told her where it had been found, and the other equivocated and contradicted herself; and at last, after a promise of forgiveness, confessed with many tears that she had taken the money.

Maline was as much surprised as the girl had been.

"Did you place one of these notes in Mr. Power's blotting-pad for us to find it there?"

"Yes, Miss Maline," answered Rachel,

with a great burst of tears. "After I'd put two of them in the purse you left in the study. I watched him go out; and as your purse looked as if it hadn't been touched, I took the notes out again, and put one of them in Mr. Power's blotter."

"You put two of them in my purse, you say? When was that?"

"On Monday, Miss Maline. I slipped into the room while Mr. Power was seeing you to the carriage, and I saw the purse on the table."

The girl's answer was a revelation to Maline. She now saw, as by an inspiration, that Wilfred Power had gone away on her account, thinking she had taken the money, and thus had tried to shield her by drawing suspicion on himself.

"Where is the money? Fetch what you have of it."

"I have it all, miss, upstairs."

"Why did you do this, Rachel?"

For a long time the girl did not answer. Then she confessed that she had a friend who was in great distress for want of money; when she went into the study at lunch-time on the day she had heard of the trouble, she saw the money in the table-drawer, and the sudden temptation was more than she could resist. What she had afterwards done was merely to keep away suspicion from herself until the time for her to leave should arrive. She had thought that Wilfred Power would be most likely to be suspicious, and so she had first tried to draw his thoughts on Maline; and thinking she had failed, as the purse did not seem to have been opened, she tried to fix suspicion upon him.

"You are a bad, wicked girl," said Maline. "Go and pack your things and leave the house at once."

Mr. Caringham and Wilfred were both in the library when Maline entered.

"Is this the money you lost, papa?" she asked, quietly putting the gold and notes down on the table.

"Good gracious, Maline!" cried her father in amazement. "What does this mean?"

And then she told them.

Wilfred and Maline had a further and much longer explanation in the drawing-room after dinner that night, when Mr. Caringham was asleep in the library. At the end of it Maline said:

"And so, sir, you thought I was a little

thief, did you, when you saw the notes in my purse, and tried to shield me by pretending you had done it?"

"Not more than you thought I was one when that note tumbled out of my blotting-pad, and you confessed to the theft. But you were a little thief after all, for you stole my heart, Mal."

"Then we were both thieves; for you took mine away ever so long ago."

And the lovers' amen closed the dispute.

### A DEMONSTRATION SKETCH.

"WHAT would the old Duke say to it all!" was the exclamation of a grizzled veteran, looking over at the crowd at Hyde Park Corner, where the Duke himself, in effigy upon his bronze horse, rising out of the forest of heads, might have been taken for the field-marshal directing the whole demonstration in this which is practically the workman's May Day. And nobody thinks of the old Duke now, any more than of Hector of Troy, or of the joyous popular fêtes that once ushered in the month of flowers.

"Where's Troy, and where's the May-pole in the Strand?" Where is the May Queen, and Jack in the Green, whom even the sweeps seem to have given up? Where is the procession of four-in-hand stage-coaches? Yet we have had the dust-carts and their horses all decked with ribbons and finery, and the omnibus-drivers have donned their white hats and summer coats, and there has been no lack of flowers and ribbons everywhere. And now people are turning out in their thousands, and tens of thousands, just to have a look at what is going on, and banners flutter in the breeze, and there is music in the air — anyhow, the braying of brass instruments, with the thud of the big drums. And all this on the first Sunday in May, which is likely to perpetuate itself into distant ages, in a succession of workman's Sundays.

It might have been otherwise had the day been wet, with everybody draggled and miserable, and the processions more or less of a failure. But for once the elements are favourable to a popular demonstration; and though there is a yellowish haze, resembling what gardeners call a blight in the air, and there is a lack of sunshine to brighten up the scene, yet it is the right sort of weather to march from Poplar, or Deptford, or Peckham, all

through London streets, to Hyde Park, and back again, without being unduly troubled with either heat or cold. So that this celebration may be fairly said to have "caught on"; and having a many-sided and even international character—for there is talk everywhere, in workshops and workmen's clubs, of the solidarity of working men all over the civilised world—it is probable that this will be an anniversary to be remembered in future times as the beginning of what these future times only will know.

But while the old Duke is presiding over the teeming crowd outside the Park gates, and the nurses and patients in the big hospital are peeping out of the windows, and the tall, aristocratic houses look down on the scene with a subdued kind of interest, within the Park the show is even more impressive. The well-known corner which in this merry month of May is the rendezvous of wealth and fashion, where rows upon rows of chairs are filled with lookers-on and idlers; where there is a general show of the finest horses and best appointed equipages in Europe, while through the trees you may see the fair horsegomen, and their cavaliers, cantering smoothly over the favourite ride—all this has been rolled away like the set scene of a theatre, and its place is taken by a thronging crowd of all ranks and denominations. Right up to the very heel of Achilles, as if in some great amphitheatre, rises the mass of round black hats and white faces, not unmixed with the feathers and flowers of feminine head-gear. There are carriages, too, drawn up by the railings—but not the costly equipages of duchesses and millionaires, but homely family vans, that work in coals and cabbages or potatoes during the week; the coster's cart, with miladi coster in tall hat and ostrich feathers, with a gipsy beauty of her own; the rag-and-bone man's four-wheeled repository, with the wiry pony in the shafts; the fat-collector and wash-contractor—for pigs, and not for complexion—brings his smart wagonette; and there are hundreds more vehicles of every kind—except the grand and aristocratic—all crammed with the families and friends of their owners, all bent on enjoyment, and with very little thought for any ulterior object.

Indeed, for the majority of these people who are on their own hook, so to say, and skirmish for their daily bread among the streets and markets, the eight hours' day

is a mere phantom of the imagination. "My day's when I've emptied my barrer," says a coster, dogmatically; but he adds in a more sympathetic tone: "Still, those chaps as want it ought to have it."

But while these are on pleasure bent, there are others intent on business. Oranges, nuts, and apples are already in demand—your Harry is never so mean as to grudge his Sarah the cost of a little light refreshment; and there are cakes of a peculiar demonstration compound, which do not appear in the market at less hungry times. Then there are men and boys hawking "Official Programmes," the "New York Herald," the "Commonweal"; the Organ of Socialism, the "People's Press," which represents certain Trade Unions; with sundry other papers and leaflets—here religious, and there very much the reverse; but no ballad, for, though there are socialist poets, yet no popular bard has yet arisen—in Hyde Park, anyhow—to mark the epoch with a spirit-stirring song.

There is not long to wait for the processions, the heads of which, with banners displayed, are seen struggling through the dense crowd about the gates, while the brass bandsmen are deprived for the moment of the use of their instruments, and even of the breath to blow them. The big banners, too, are embarrassing in a crowd; the poles and their bearers are forced in different directions. There is a positive pole which will advance, and a negative one that hangs back; and the four men who hold the strings that steady the machine fore and aft, are hurried away by opposing currents. Yet the standard-bearers struggle gallantly through their difficulties, which are soon over, by the way; for once fairly within the Park, the crowd is more diffused, and the banners are gallantly advanced, while the societies who march beneath them come on, nine or ten abreast, in very good form and order.

All these who come in by Hyde Park Corner are connected with the London Trades' Council, a body which is considered a little slow and conservative by more advanced members of other organisations. For three different sections, having different aims and views, have united for this Sunday's demonstration. The Central Committee, which embraces all kind of skilled and unskilled labour; the Trades' Council, which combines the chief skilled artisans of the metropolis, and the Social Democratic Federation, whose programme

is more extensive than either of the others.

So that on this side of the Park, which is the first to score in the business, we have the leather and metal-workers, the cabinet-makers, the carpenters, with shipping trades, and clothing trades, and printing trades—indeed, with almost every trade that could be mentioned. But hardly are the Trades' Council men fairly under weigh, when a rush of people towards the other road announces the arrival of the Marble Arch contingent, preceded by a very fine-looking horseman, brilliant with coloured scarves and decorations, and wearing a red Phrygian cap of the good old "Mourir pour la patrie" order, who bestrides with grace a veteran cream-coloured steed. The effect of a little colour and display on the popular imagination is evident, for there is a general crush to witness this horseman, whom we suppose to be the Field-Marshal commanding-in-chief. When this conspicuous figure has passed, there is nothing to cause excitement except the banners, many of which are of elaborate design in rich silk, which are costly enough, and easily damaged, and of which their bearers are naturally proud and careful. There seems to be no end to the men as they come on briskly enough, but dusty and a little fagged some of them, such as those who have come from Woolwich and Deptford, who have been on foot since ten o'clock, and it is now past three. But they are certainly well organised; and if, as used to be said, we had no British general who could get ten thousand men into Hyde Park and out of it again without a muddle, here we have a Field-Marshal who can give our commanders points, for he has marched a good many more than ten thousand in already, and the cry is still they come.

Yet all find their way with very little confusion, in spite of the crowds that surround them, to the neighbourhood of the platform assigned to each section—platforms which are arranged in a quadrilateral across the Park. There is no time wasted, for when the first detachments have taken up their ground, speaking begins from one or two of the vans which are appointed for the purpose. By this time the Park, as far as the eye can reach, is black with human beings; and yet it is easy to get about, for there is no central pageant to pack the people together; and the crowd, though pleased and good-humoured, is not enthusiastic in any way, except, perhaps,

in favour of the female contingent—the laundresses, who step out with characteristic courage, and seem to enjoy the popular ovation.

But here at one of the platforms there is a pretty tight squeeze, and a crowd that goes on swelling in dimensions, for the sturdy-looking man, with the short, crisp black beard and moustache, and the air of one who has some authority hereabouts, is Mr. John Burns, the popular hero of the hour; and when it is his turn to speak, there is more enthusiasm than has hitherto been elicited. Yet Mr. Burns' method is not exactly that of an orator, but he is ready and confident, quick to seize a point, and with a sense of humour that puts people on good terms with him. Then it is refreshing to hear some good-tempered, honest-looking working man, who is conscious of having had a good deal to say, but who finds it all running out rather thin under the pressure of circumstances. "What the eight hours' day—the legal eight hours—will do for us is just this. We can do our work with our shirts on."

And as this utterance is rather enigmatical, the speaker refers us to a banner, on which, indeed, is conspicuous—first, the man of long hours, working stripped to the skin, and evidently taking it out of himself very much; while the companion picture is of a smiling artisan, with a fine white shirt on, and wristbands delicately tucked up, who is wielding his hammer with a skill and dexterity that puts his companion in the shade.

And one is struck by the limited range of the human voice in such open-air meetings, and thinks how the higher qualities of oratory are, perhaps, wasted under such circumstances. And there are so many unavoidable interruptions, as when a powerful brass-band marches up in full blast, and drowns the leader's voice altogether, so that he can only gesticulate in dumb show, and shake his fist at the too successful competitors for a hearing.

But, after all, it is best to wander about from one platform to another, and take the speeches for granted, and to watch the late arrivals taking up their ground and doing their best to pick up the more forward ones in the way of speeches and resolutions. Tired members of the processions are stretched on the grass in little groups, resting after their weary walk, and re-

flecting, perhaps, that there is an equal distance to be travelled back again.

Vendors of lemonade are doing a brisk trade; oranges are in full demand; and even the rock-bound cakes find ready purchasers. And the old cream-coloured horse is resting, too, and yet does not find much refreshment in the trampled grass or in the coating of orange-peel which, in places, almost conceals the natural herbage. His eight hours' day must be well-nigh completed; and a feed of oats and a bucket of water would come in nicely now.

Indeed, the general aspect of the representatives of labour seems to say: We have demonstrated enough, and now let us go home. And, with this, there is a general packing up of speech and resolution into small compass. The banners are on the move again and beginning to jostle with others belonging to bodies that are still pouring in, and that will have to speak, and resolve, and march off again in double-quick time if they mean to get home tonight. And so there follows a general break-up and exodus, and, coming into the Bayswater Road, it is astonishing to see how the whole street is crowded up as far as the eye can reach; while omnibuses are carried by storm and furiously overcrowded, while, for the great bulk of us, there is only the leg-wearing tramp over long miles of stones.

It is a far cry from here to Clerkenwell Green, and yet, when that is reached, it is for many only a halting-place in a longer pilgrimage. How would you like to tramp to the Triangle, Hackney, as a half-way house; or to look forward to the end of your journey at Barking? And what of the people from Erith or Dartford? When may they expect to see the cheerful lights of home, brighter for them than the garish splendour of the lights of London?

The bands, too, are silent now; the poor bandsmen, in their old regimental coats and tarnished facings, look more fagged than anybody, unless it be the standard-bearers, who have to struggle on with their load without the excitement of the morning's display. Yet everybody trudges off contentedly enough, and it is marvellous to see how little roughness or larking there is among such a vast assemblage; the rough element is very little noticeable, far less so than at great ceremonial functions where the whole police force is poured out, with Horse Guards and Foot Guards, to keep the streets.

## BREVITY.

THE soul of wit is often also the soul of good nature as well as good sense. "The less said the soonest mended," is applicable to numberless events in our mottled course of life. Cannot, therefore, some compressed form of speech, such as, "and so on," or, "et cetera," be devised for the shortening of superfluous talk? It would prove a blessing on many an occasion in both public and private circumstances.

Brevity does not mean absolute silence; only moderation in the output of phrases. Talk need not be a torrent in order to avoid unpleasant resemblance to the stagnant pool of taciturnity. A moderate flow of words is preferable, and will produce a better effect than either of the two extremes. One's meaning can mostly be expressed with clearness without speeches that would fill a daily newspaper.

As an example of judicious abbreviation, a foreign journal once contained the following announcement:

"Yesterday, at one o'clock of the afternoon, M. le Général Espinasse received the officers of the National Guard of Paris. The Minister told them that the Emperor reckoned upon their support and concurrence if ever public order should be threatened; that, hitherto, people had made the mistake of erroneously believing in the subsidence of evil passions; that, consequently, it was necessary for all honest men to unite and make common cause against the common enemy," etc.

It might have been hoped that this rapidly-conclusive style of eloquence would have found a few imitators. What labyrinths and abysses of circumlocution might be avoided by the adoption of a like comprehensive formula! It is a branch of rhetoric which patriotic orators—anxious to deserve their country's gratitude—would do well to cultivate. It is the concentration of a host of arguments into the shortest possible space. It comprises a vast cloud of hazy sentences, by condensing them into a single luminous point. In short, it is the sparkling nucleus of a comet, which shines all the brighter for having devoured its own tail.

The hydraulic press of brevity in speech is equally applicable to domestic life, and with equally happy results.

After a hard day's work I come home tired and hungry. I sit down to dinner

opposite to my dearly-beloved Amelia. While eating my soup, she tells me that both the fish and the leg of mutton, which are coming, are utterly spoiled, because Betsy's—the cook's—second cousin has been lounging up and down our street the whole afternoon. The fish and mutton make their appearance. Spoiled they certainly are. And all the while that I am serving, carving, and partaking of them, I am made to listen to an endless dissertation on Betsy's innumerable delinquencies: how she tried my own Amelia's newest bonnet; how she put her fingers into the sugar-basin and her spoon into the tea-caddy; and how she did a great many other naughty things, the history of which is not concluded when I have finished my cheese.

I try in vain to put an end to the doleful tale by gently remarking: "Well, dear Amelia, if such be the case—although I do not like such frequent changes—you had better get rid of Betsy at the end of her month."

Now, would it not be a great advantage if ladies, under similar circumstances, would contrive to conclude their harangue before the removal of the soup, by observing: "Betsy has ruined the dinner. Betsy is evidently crazy after a sweetheart. Betsy will probably ruin the dinner tomorrow, the next day, and in *sæcula sæculorum*, until she gets married to the idol of her heart, when she will probably get a beating for every dinner she spoils. I need say no more; you know all about it. We had better look out for a new cook. That's all."

Would not the happy introduction of "That's all," allow many a man to eat his mutton in peace?

Again: I go to bed with an ill-digested meal, which oppresses my chest like a lump of lead. I try to sleep off the incubus; but my darling Amelia, reclining by my side, returns to the charge.

"It is quite impossible," she says, "to keep Betsy to the end of her month. She answered impertinently this very evening. What will my mother and the rest of my relations think if I keep Betsy after that? What will Miss MacCrustie and Mrs. MacGrumpie say?"

Thereupon follows an expounding and an improvement of this text, which renders repose so impossible that I quietly slip out of bed and walk up and down the room until dear Amelia's regular snoring announces that she has talked herself to sleep.

But would it not have been a great improvement if my better half, while disrobing, had laconically observed: "John, my love, I can't stand Betsy any longer. Betsy must pack up her bundles tomorrow morning. And so, good night!"

It would have prevented the waste of a deal of breath, and have spared dear Amelia's lungs for more pressing occasions.

With such an agitated commencement as this, my night's rest is naturally troubled. All the bulls of Bashan are rushing after me; or, I am standing on the edge of Dover Cliff, and Betsy is on the point of pushing me over, in revenge for my consenting to her discharge from our service; or, I am walking along Cheapside at ten in the morning, and some miscreant has robbed me of my coat and small-clothes.

At daybreak there is a robber in the house. Yes, certainly there is a robber. This time it is not a nightmare; for I hear his footsteps coming upstairs as plainly as I hear the beats of my heart. I seize the poker and rush to the landing, to protect Amelia and the plate-basket, and there I encounter my first-born, Joseph, his mother's pet, in evening dress considerably disarranged, looking dusty in costume, haggard in countenance, and a little we-won't-go-home-till-morning-ish.

"How did you come here, sir, at this time of day? And where have you been spending the night, sir? I insist on knowing that."

"Dear mamma has allowed me to have a latch-key lately. And—and—I have been introduced to—to a very select club; to a very fashionable and select club indeed."

At which response to my enquiries I commence a long lecture; in truth, an interminable jobation, in which I tell my son and heir that he will come to the gallows, and that he will turn my hair grey—it is brown, with a slight tinge of red, at present—before the end of the week.

My youngster really seems ashamed of himself; notwithstanding which outward sign of penitence, I believe that, being in the vein, I should have gone on scolding from that time to this if the draught from the attic stairs had not set my teeth a-chattering.

On second thoughts, however, I fancy it would have been quite as well, and would have made quite as great an impression on the culprit, if I had simply observed: "Joe, my dear boy, I am glad, at least,

that you have told me the truth. But, Joseph, my son, if you consider, you will have the good sense to perceive that select clubs, like yours, are bad for the pocket, bad for the character, bad for the next day's office attendance. I will take charge of the latch-key which your foolish mother gave you. There, that's all! That will do for once. Go to bed now if it is worth the while."

In the course of that very same morning while going to the City on urgent business—business that did not admit of a second's delay—when half-way up Ludgate Hill, I met, travelling in the opposite direction, an old and valued friend. Indeed, I may as well state at once that it was Spriggins, my Joseph's godfather at his own particular request, the worthiest creature in the universe, only he can never find the word he wants, and he keeps you waiting until he has found it.

"What a dismal day, Smith, isn't it?" he observed, taking my arm to prevent my escape. "Still, I have hopes that the sun may break out; for Brown has just told me that his—hum! You know what I mean—his—bless me! Why, I know the name of the thing as well as I know my own. He says that his—ha!—his instrument for measuring the— No, not the weather exactly—his barometer—yes, that's it—is getting up. And, what is remarkable for this time of the year, he assures me that he has in his back garden a—ha! Why, how strange! I have it at my fingers' ends: he has a—hum—a—dear me! It was called after the nymph—who was—in Ovid, you remember—who was metamorphosed into—yes, it is that. He has a Daphne mezerion in full blossom. Wonderful for the season!"

Anybody else I would have shaken off; but my old bachelor friend Spriggins, Joseph's godfather, with no relatives nearer than fifteenth cousins—impossible! Nevertheless, I should have saved ten valuable minutes if Spriggins had confined his salutation to, "Dull day, Smith. Hum! ha! Good-bye."

I might discourse of what is to be heard at, or rather after, public dinners; also at august assemblies, which may not be alluded to more pointedly than by saying that each calls each "another place."

For once, I will practise what I preach, and cut the matter short by quoting: "A word to the wise suffices."

## KESTELL OF GREYSTONE.

A SERIAL STORY.

BY ESMÉ STUART.

*Author of "Muriel's Marriage," "Joan Yellacot,"  
"A Faire Dame," etc., etc.*

### CHAPTER XLVIII. REALLY IN LOVE.

HOEL FENNER had not dared go and lodge nearer to Rushbrook than Greystone; neither here, even, had he found the courage to go to the hotel where he had put up on a previous occasion. First, because the associations connected with it were of too painful a character; and, secondly, because he was afraid of being recognised. He had chosen a quiet lodging, where the good woman who kept it was, happily for him, a new-comer, and had never heard any gossip about Miss Kestell.

His intention was to find Jesse Vicary; his conscience now told him he owed it to this man to give him all the information he had unfortunately found out.

He set off to Rushbrook, therefore, with the full determination of at once making a clean breast of it; but before he reached the well-known place, Hoel was thinking only of Elva. Every new scene of beauty that unfolded itself before him this May morning brought back painfully the thought of what he had lost. It was more than painful—it was maddening.

"My own folly, my own cursed hypocrisy; I fancied myself better than others, and, as that good, simple-hearted Sister Marie said, in judging others I injured them. I thought him a scoundrel, and now I cannot be sure that I did not act the part of one myself. Not sure? Yes, I am sure. But what is the use of accusing myself? It is too late, too late; she has long written me down a rascal; and it will not be Walter Akister who will undeceive her. Very soon she will be his—out of my reach for ever."

His clenched hand, and the perspiration that started from his pale forehead, proved well enough his mental sufferings.

"I must see her again, if only once more—yes, even if it is on her wedding-day. I must!"

The longing to see her face was like the longing of a man, who is dying of thirst, for cold water.

"Will she look changed? Will she bear any trace of suffering?"

He paused as he set his weary feet on

the heather, now still wet with dew. Hoel Fenner was by no means the strong, energetic man he had once been. The French doctor had told him plainly he might feel the effects of that cruel immersion all his life, and that he would always, or for a long time, have to take care of himself. Already Hoel had found that after walking a few miles he was much spent. Bodily weakness, more than anything else, inclined him to humility of spirit.

The great, lonely heath was the same as when he had wooed and won Elva Kestell; but to him all appeared changed. The grey clouds swept slowly above him, only occasionally allowing a peep of blue to be seen; there seemed to be a feeling of sorrow in Nature, which Hoel thought did not alone mean the echo of his own thoughts. Was the strong-minded Hoel becoming superstitious?

Having reflected on Jesse's probable movements, he decided that he would certainly not go to the Home Farm. Perhaps he would lodge with the Joyces; and if not, they would know of his whereabouts. Most likely Vicary had come, in despair of better sources of information, to make enquiries of the forest villagers about his parents.

"He will not find the clue," thought Hoel; "but it is better he should try than— No; what am I saying? I wish to spare her again, and I must not. But, at least, I will do all I can to soften the blow. Elva, Elva, you have conquered! I love you still."

By the time the Joyces' cottage was in sight Hoel was very pale and weary—so much so, indeed, that he was glad to hear when he reached it, that Mr. Vicary was sleeping there for a few nights, but that he spent all his days wandering about the country, and was not likely to be in soon.

"If you want him, sir," said the old woman, "I'll tell him to stay in to-morrow."

"No, no, do not trouble him about me; we are sure to meet. I came down to see him; but there is no hurry, I am lodging at Greystone. I shall be coming over again."

Hoel hurried out; and when he was once more walking on the springy heather, his conscience felt eased about Vicary. He had sought him out, and it was not his fault that he had not seen him. Now he would wait till after the wedding to reveal every-

thing to Jesse. That would be time enough, and by then Elva would be gone. It did once come across his mind that Jesse might go to Rushbrook House, but he dismissed the idea as unlikely. "He cannot go without proofs, and these—how should he find them? Let Elva at least know nothing of all this; better so, for her sake—for her sake. Have I not brought enough misery already into her life? I fancied I could forget her, that I could root out the remembrance of her from my mind, and now I see it is hopeless; but, good Heavens, will it always be so—always?"

He could not bear to stay on this beautiful moorland. Its beauty repelled him, maddened him; he could not stand being within sight of Rushbrook House, and yet so far away—near or far, what did it matter? He was an outcast from it, and from her. One day more, and then he could return here and see Elva giving herself away to another. Hoel Fenner turned his back on Rushbrook, and hurried away in the direction of Greystone; his brain seemed to reel. Weak he might be, but this thought gave him strength to hurry away. He fancied he should never have the fortitude to return and see Elva again; but, at the same time, he had an overpowering longing to see her. Once more—only once more, if even on her wedding-day!

To himself he appeared a changed man. All the feelings which had driven him away from Elva seemed to sink into insignificance compared to her love; all the pride which had forced him to throw away her happiness and his own vanished, although the obstacle remained black and hideous as before; but all this remorse came too late, it would now be dishonourable to try and see her, and speak to her. How intently he longed to go and seek her out, and to throw himself on her mercy! Would she forgive him? No; why should she? Her very act showed how utterly she renounced him, and how utterly she despised him!

At times he tried to comfort himself with the thought that he could not have done otherwise, that if he were once more placed in the same position he would act in like manner; but even as he said this he knew that now at least it would all be different, that Elva was as pure and as innocent as it is in the power of humanity to be, and that for her he could face shame. Now it was, however, useless to speculate on the might-have-been — useless, useless, the

word rang out with the clearness which despair seems to give to mental words ; it was only while walking on Elva's own heather hills that true love made itself felt in the heart of Hoel Fenner. Clever, highly polished, honourable, a gentleman in the world's understanding of that word, he had never known what true love meant till this moment when it was taken from him. Only now was Hoel a lover, in its noblest sense. Only now he forgot himself in thinking of Elva's happiness, whilst before it had been that he had thought first of his own happiness in possessing Elva.

It was this which made the struggle between love and duty so difficult ; and it was this which made him put off seeking out Jesse Vicary, for he could not resist the desire to sacrifice any one rather than Elva.

"What can it matter that Jesse should remain in ignorance a day longer ?" he thought again and again, as the next morning, after a miserable and sleepless night, he rose with his mind filled with only one thought. "Let my darling begin her life without another cloud at least. When she is gone, then I will do the best I can for the man her father has wronged. But it is not possible that she can love Akister. No, no, Elva, you cannot understand what you are doing ; you cannot understand the wrong you are doing to yourself. And to-morrow morning—Good Heavens ! Is it too late even now ? Shall I go to her and tell her all—all ? No, no ; what right have I to do so ? She would say, 'Why did you not come to me at first ? Was it to save me, or yourself ?' Fool that I was—it was to save myself. What could I say ? Would she not scorn me a thousand times more—she, so noble, so utterly single-minded ? No ; now it is for her happiness that I let her go on believing that I do not love her ; she would not believe that I could see things differently ; she would scorn me as I deserve to be scorned. And Vicary, what will he say ? Will he not call me a coward for running away ? I have not been a true friend even to him. It is enough to make a man throw up everything. Well, to-morrow it will be all repaired. To-morrow, Elva will be avenged, and Jesse can be, too, if he so wishes."

But to-day seemed unbearable. Hoel could settle down to nothing ; he longed to fly over to Rushbrook, and demand, insist on seeing Elva. And then all the

old reasoning came back, and he shrank mentally from the scorn he would read in her face, and perhaps hear her express.

It was terrible to Hoel to see his own conduct placed so clearly in the wrong—not by others, but by his own conscience. It was this self-abasement, achieved by his own acute reasoning, which was to a man of his temperament harder to bear than even public reproach.

Now, however, he mistrusted his own judgement ; now he would not follow the instinct which told him not to delay because he felt it must be mixed with jealousy and hopeless love.

"You have wronged the woman who loved you and trusted you," said his silent accuser. "And you have also wronged the man who believed in you. And both these wrongs arose from your self-love."

For the first time Hoel understood the meaning of some words he had once read : "Conscientia est cordis scientia"—"Conscience is the knowledge of the heart"—not a mere petty holding of the scales of actions, not an anxiety to balance the pros and cons, but a much grander motive power, striking directly at the heart and asking for the same justice to others which we give to ourselves.

The mental agony he had gone through reacted on his weakened frame ; by the afternoon he felt quite unable to make further exertion, and a terrible fear possessed him that he would not be able the next day to reach St. John's Church in time for the ceremony. He must creep in among the crowd, for it would be impossible to go to the Heatons and ask for hospitality ; it would put them in a false position. Besides, it was more than possible that the estimable Clara would shut the door in his face ; for Hoel believed that every one knew it was his doing that Elva had been forsaken. He must, therefore, pass in with the crowd. Should he be able to get so far ? He felt already that the strain was too much for him, and that he was doing a foolish thing in going to have one more look at his darling's face.

He threw himself on the horse-hair sofa in his dull lodging, and tried hard to compose his mind. How solitary he felt now the illness had impaired that former perfect health ! How he craved for sympathy and love ; and, for all answer to his cravings, conscience told him he had, with his own hand, cut himself off from both ! He looked forward and saw in the future a

life of success, perhaps, but always a life with so-called public friends and public applause. He wondered if he should marry; but not one form but Elva's rose before his mind. She alone had been able to win him, and she alone, he felt almost though unwillingly certain, would never be displaced. Hoel was not a man to be easily influenced or easily touched by love. Well, perhaps then, in the future, he might marry—for convenience—and what then?

"Without true love, as well leave it alone; I have had enough of shams. Besides, now I shall not be rich enough to tempt the seekers after matrimony."

The outlook was dull, intensely dull, because Hoel felt he should sink back into the literary bachelor, the man who lives on small admiration, and on the impertinent patronage of the ignorant, who admire talent simply for its reflected light. Pshaw! that life anyhow would be wasted—would be easily replaced when it was extinguished; and after that?

"I suppose," he said at last, weary, utterly weary of everything, "I shall, somehow or other, manage to exist without ambition. Thousands of men do so. I shall have the satisfaction of knowing that, if Kestell of Greystone is a scoundrel, I am as bad."

At that moment the landlady entered with a cup of tea.

"I'm sure, sir, you do look bad," she said; "but a cup of tea is safe to do you good. As long as my poor dear husband could drink his tea, I knew he was not going to die. It was only when he turned from it that I began to be afraid. Look, sir, there's a fine carriage going by! There's to be a grand wedding to-morrow at Rushbrook Beacon. It's the daughter of a gentleman who is well known in the town. The milkman's been talking about it. Milkmen do pick up news, and waters it, too, as they do the milk. Mr. Kestell of Greystone—it's his daughter as is to be married to the son of Lord Cartmel. It will be a pretty affair. They say the young lady is very handsome; and, anyhow, she's rich. Mr. Kestell has got an office in this town. Mr. Hope's his partner."

"Ah—I—I—think I shall walk over and see the wedding," said Hoel, trying to appear indifferent.

"You don't look fit for the walk, sir; they say it is five miles; but there, a bit of excitement is good for us all; and, maybe,

sir, that if you are contemplating matrimony, it will interest you."

"I am doing nothing of the kind," said Hoel, impatiently.

"Ah, there's another carriage—look, sir; it's Mr. Kestell himself, I believe; leastways, that's the same old gentleman with white hair, and kind face, they showed me before."

Hoel started up just in time to see the face of Mr. Kestell of Greystone. "To-morrow," said Hoel to himself, "to-morrow." Aloud he remarked:

"Yes, that is Mr. Kestell."

"Then you know him, sir; well, no wonder you wish to go to the wedding! Mrs. Moreton was telling me yesterday that Miss Kestell was to be married before to another gentleman; but she jilted him. I dare say, now, it was to make the lord's son propose to her. Girls are so very flighty in these days. It's fortunate it's turned out well; but if she's one of the flighty sort, the first gentleman has had a good riddance of her, that's what I think! Most people pities the women; but I pity the men, for, queer as they are, there is some very strange women among the sort as get married."

Hoel only retained one idea out of all this, and this was that Elva had encouraged him to get an offer from Walter Akister.

The idea was insane, and he knew it to be so; but all the same he said: "I will go to the wedding to-morrow, even if it brings on the fever again, I will." What small things determine the great events of lives!

#### CHAPTER XLIX. A STRANGE SIGHT.

JESSE VICARY had heard of Hoel Fenner's visit and enquiry for him, and he had laughed it to scorn. It was this very visit that had hurried on his own action, and his determination this time to act for himself.

"Mr. Fenner will ask me to wait another week and to do nothing," he said to himself, as he went down towards Rushbrook House on the evening before the wedding. "I will not trust to him or any one else again, I will believe in myself only; it is because I am poor and an outcast, that the rich are willing to trample me down. Heaven knows I am willing to be poor; but at all events let me have justice, let the man who poses for benevolence itself know that his sin will find him out, has found him out. He may be too busy

to see me, but he will not refuse ; he shall not. Do not I see the whole thing now as clearly as if it were written in red on a white sheet ? Yes ; his benevolence when we could not help ourselves ; his careful patronage for fear Symee and I should presume on his kindness ; his anxiety that we should rely on ourselves and on our own work, for fear the world should say that he had led us to expect too much. Well, let all that pass. We were entitled to so little by the justice of the law, and that little he has given us ; but when he saw that I had discovered his secret—no, I had not discovered it, I merely wanted to know, as every man may want to know, to whom he owes his life—then his conscience trembled, and he turned against me. Did his paltry artifice hide it from me ? No, indeed ; when the truth burst upon me, did he have one spark of honesty and own it ? Not he ! no, he had better ideas. Having lived in a lie all his life, he thought to bury his lie and to ship off the children, whom he had doomed to a life of outcasts, to another land I can see him now offering that advantageous farm in Canada. How near I was to accepting it, and kissing the hand that offered me such a blessing ; how near ! And then, with this last act of benevolence, Kestell of Greystone could have posed again as an incomparable friend. But Heaven does not blindfold justice as we do. I refused him, and baulked him in his well-laid scheme, and then Kestell of Greystone begins to work his evil plans still further. Does the scoundrel believe that I am ignorant of the name of the man who caused me to be dismissed ? Does he think that I am such a poor fool as to believe Card and Lilley were not paid to dismiss their clerk ? No, I was a weak fool before ; but I have to thank Mr. Kestell for opening my eyes. What better person could have offered me the fruit of the tree of knowledge of evil ? The good he never knew, except when falsely painted to make a show in the world.

"I was dismissed, and then he believed that I should come and crave humbly for that Canada farm. He little knew me if he thought this ; I would a thousand times rather die of starvation on his doorstep than accept another crust of bread which was paid for with his money. And Symee's coming—yes, I dare say if one were able to follow the workings of such a mind, that, too, was his doing. He thought Symee would work on my feel-

ings ; that she would smooth me down ; that, perhaps—for what does he care?—that seeing her suffer would humble me. He little understands me, his own—"

At this point of his meditation, which was nearly word for word the same which had seethed through his brain for days and weeks, Jesse Vicary had come upon Amice Kestell standing on the bridge.

She was his daughter, that was all he knew at this moment ; and as for the rest, whatever obstacle might be in his way, he would now—yes, now, at last, he would trample it under foot.

It is terrible to be possessed with one idea, terrible to feel that life or death, joy or sorrow, are all of no account in comparison with the realisation of the supreme thought. Had Amice decidedly denied him an entrance, Jesse would have taken no heed to her words. Nothing could stop him now, and certainly not Amice Kestell, his daughter.

When they reached the hall—which was not yet lighted up, as the daylight had barely crept out of it, and Jones was very busy with solemn overlooking of the plate necessary for the next day's function—Amice Kestell paused, and shutting the door, turned and stood face to face with Jesse Vicary. She could not see the expression of his face, but she recalled only too well how he had looked when she had seen him in London.

"Jesse Vicary, will you reconsider your wish to see my father ? I am afraid you are not in a fit state to think calmly. Will you not wait till after my sister's wedding ? We have had much trouble here since last year."

Amice's tone was very pleading and very humble. At another time it would have seemed strange indeed that she should be asking something of him which he would not grant. Now he only chafed at the slight delay.

"I must see him. Tell him, Miss Kestell, that Jesse Vicary is here, and must see him now or to-morrow morning. I have told you so already. Why will you try and alter my determination ?"

"Because you may live to regret this. If we have wronged you, Mr. Vicary—and that is what you believe—will you not think better of acting hastily ?"

Amice crept up to him as if impelled by an unseen power, and laid the gentlest hand upon his arm. So gentle was it, indeed, that for a moment Jesse did not realise what she was doing ; and so

powerful was it that for a moment it was able to calm him enough to bear to listen to the end of her sentence.

"Will you try and remember that it is infinitely more blessed to suffer wrong than to inflict it; that it is not you who need a divine pity, but all those who have betrayed their trust, whatever it may be. It is not because I wish to be spared that I ask for your pity. Heaven knows, if I were capable, I would willingly bear all the misery for them—for those I love—but I cannot. I can only entreat you to have patience, to accept the part chosen by the Great Example we pretend to follow; and whatever is in your heart tonight, for His sake, not for ours, to crush it out."

Powerful must have been Amice's voice and her words to have quelled, even for this short time, the tide of human passion; but Jesse Vicary had given his wrath place for too long to be able to master it now, or, indeed, to be kept back for more than an instant. He shook off the gentle hand with a movement of passion; and the flood, arrested for one moment in its furious course, raged only more terribly when the slight barrier was hurled away.

"Are you then in his secrets? Is this another trap for me—another way of putting off the day of justice? I have sworn to be revenged, or at least to have common justice. Miss Kestell, I will not sink into the slum of outcast society without one effort at getting righted, or of making—"

"Hush!" said Amice, "you forget you are talking to Mr. Kestell's daughter. I do not know what you are speaking of. Wait here, in my father's study, and if he chooses he will come to you."

Amice opened the study-door and beckoned Jesse in. Weak woman she might be when compared with this strong man; yet she possessed that dignity which, conscious as she was that Jesse was in the right, could not be crushed. At this moment she had the strength of weakness; and Jesse, though blinded with passion, could not have spoken another word to her after she had bidden him to be silent.

But, in truth, she did not wait for another word; she closed the door upon him, and, quivering in every limb, she went towards the drawing-room. She did not give herself time to think, she positively dared not; that Jesse Vicary was determined to see her father she felt sure, and if her

father would not go to him, then most likely Vicary would force his way into the drawing-room. This must be prevented, and, though she herself was quite unnerved, she was strong enough when duty spoke to follow its dictates.

She opened the door gently so as not to alarm Elva, and, pausing a moment, Amice saw something which made the blood appear to freeze in her veins.

There was a lamp on the piano, and Elva was seated there; she was conscious of this, though she saw only one object—this was her father lying flat on the sofa, one arm was hanging down so that she noticed his hand touched the floor. His eyes were shut and his face perfectly colourless.

Amice made one step forward with a suppressed cry of "Papa!" The thought darted through her mind: "How can Elva sit there so unconcerned? Papa is very ill, he has fainted."

All at once, however, Elva rose up and said:

"Amice, dear, what is it? Papa is here in the window-seat. We can't bear to shut out the light of our last evening."

Amice paused, horror-struck; she gazed again at the sofa—no one was there; what she had seen was— Her pale lips refused to form the word; even her brain rebelled against the notion that what she had seen was but a false creation of her brain.

What really roused her was her father himself rising from the low window-seat, and coming a step towards her. With the light behind him she could not see his features, but his white hair gleamed in the hall-light in contrast with his black coat.

"Well, Amice, what is it?"

His voice unconsciously altered now, when he addressed his younger daughter. To Elva's ears it grated harshly. Amice made an effort to control herself.

"Papa, Jesse Vicary is in your study, but do not go to him—do not see him; send word by Jones that you are occupied."

The short sentences were jerked out as if by a great effort of will.

"What do you mean?" said Mr. Kestell, very slowly. "Why should I not go and see Jesse Vicary? I did not know he was at Rushbrook."

Amice dropped her hands helplessly by her side. She seemed to hear Elva's voice as if it were very far off. She did not

move one step backward or forward ; but stood in the middle of the room where she had just uttered her startled cry.

" Dear Amice thinks you are tired, papa," said Elva. " I thought you said Jesse Vicary had behaved very ungratefully. Please do as Amice suggests, and tell him you are busy. It is true, you know. I want you."

Mr. Kestell walked back to Elva as if he meant to obey her suggestion. He took her hand in his, and kissed her.

" You will miss your old father, eh, dear ? "

Elva's arms were round his neck in a moment, and a little sob was heard in the big, silent, half-darkened room.

" Miss you ? Oh, papa, I am only going because you wish it. Even now—oh ! even now—"

" Hush, dear—yes, yes ; for your happiness."

He unclasped her hands.

" By the way, darling, I had better just go and see what the young man wants. Your mother is asleep, I hope. I will tell Jones to bring you a light. It has suddenly become very dark."

He walked hastily away, not once turning to glance at Amice, and Elva heard him shut the door behind him with decision. At this moment, however, she thought more of Amice, who stood there so still. Elva went quietly towards her, fearing that she must be in one of her strange moods ; and what could be done if this were so, because every one in the house was depending on her for the morrow ?

" Amice, what is the matter ? Speak, dear. Are you ill ? "

Amice opened her lips and tried to speak. She even raised her finger and pointed to the sofa. She tried, oh, so hard, to say : " Look ! " but all her senses appeared to forsake her at once, and she

fell forward in a dead faint into her sister's arms.

At that moment Jones opened the door. He was carrying a lamp.

" Jones, go quickly and fetch the nurse, and tell her to bring water and salts—anything. Miss Amice has fainted ; help me to lay her on the sofas ; and please, Jones, tell no one. She will soon recover. It is better not to frighten Mrs. Kestell, and your master is engaged. Thank you ; now go, quickly."

Jones was a wonderful servant. He obeyed to the letter, and kept his own counsel. Elva knew how terribly annoyed Amice would be if any one made a fuss about her. It was Amice's way.

It was a long time before Amice opened her eyes again ; but when she did so Elva noticed at once that she was perfectly conscious, and recognised them all—Jones, the nurse, and herself.

" You are better now, dear. Nurse has such powerful salts here. Put your hands in this cold water."

" Thank you. Did I faint ? How strange ! It is the first time in my life. Don't say anything about it. You can go, nurse."

She tried to sit up, and saw she was on the sofa. The blood rushed back to her cheeks as she struggled to her feet.

" I will get up. Thank you, Elva. I will go upstairs. Where is papa ? "

" He went to the study to speak to Mr. Vicary," said Jones, respectfully, as he handed Amice a light shawl. " I hear the front door, miss. I think Mr. Vicary must be just gone."

" Elva, go and wish papa good night, and then come upstairs. Tell him nothing about me, but ask him if he is well. He looked so—pale just now."

" I will, dear. Nurse will give you her arm."

Then Amice went out by the side door, and walked upstairs.